DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 427 370 CS 510 004

AUTHOR Schreiber, Lisa Marie
TITLE Incorporating the "R" Word into Communication Studies: The Importance of Addressing Racism.
PUB DATE 1999-11-24
NOTE 28p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Communication Association (84th, New York, NY, November 19-24, 1998).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Environment; *Communication Research; *Controversial Issues (Course Content); Ethics; Higher Education; *Racial Bias; *Racial Relations; *Research Needs; Values

ABSTRACT

There is a paucity of research on racism in communication studies in spite of the fact that racism continues to be a social problem which plagues the United States. This paper reviews evidence which points to the existence of institutionalized racism. This evidence is further supported by Carl Rowan's (1996) "The Coming Race War In America" in which he contends that the United States is headed toward an inevitable race war if action is not taken. Following this, the paper gives several suggestions that communication scholars can take to bring racism to the forefront in their classrooms, so that together they can work toward tolerance and unity. The first suggestion involves acknowledging that white privilege exists, and seeking ways to eliminate white privilege in the classroom. Next, it is proposed that understanding multicultural history is vital to understand current events so that past mistakes can be prevented from recurring. The paper also advocates that communication scholars teach a core set of values and ethics, as well as rethinking their definitions of communication competence. White supremacy should be eliminated from the field of communication as communication scholars face the problem of racism head on. Contains 40 references and a note; a 6-item glossary of terms is appended. (Author/RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 427 370

Running Head: Racism In Communication

Incorporating the "R" Word into Communication Studies: The Importance of Addressing Racism

Lisa Marie Schreiber
Ph.D. Student
Department of Communication Studies
418 Oldfather Hall
University of Nebraska - Lincoln
Lincoln, NE 68588-0329
(402) 472-2070
Lschrei148@aol.com

Presented at the National Communication Association Annual Convention, New York City, November 24, 1998.

CS510004

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

J. Schreiber

Abstract

There is a paucity of research on racism in communication studies in spite of the fact that racism continues to be a social problem which plagues the United States. In this paper, I review evidence which points to the existence of institutionalized racism. This evidence is further supported by Carl Rowan's (1996) The Coming Race War In America, in which he contends that we are headed toward an inevitable race war if action is not taken. Following this, I give several suggestions that communication scholars can take to bring racism to the forefront in our classrooms, so that together we can work toward tolerance and unity. The first suggestion involves acknowledging that white privilege exists, and seek ways to eliminate white privilege in the classroom. Next, I propose that understanding multicultural history is vital to understand current events so that past mistakes can be prevented from reoccurring. I also advocate that we teach a core set of values and ethics, as well as rethinking our definitions of communication competence. White supremacy should be eliminated from the field of communication as we face the problem of racism head on.

"You don't stick a knife in a man's back nine inches and then pull it out six inches and say you're making progress."
~ Malcolm X, 1964
(cited in West, 1993)

I am deeply troubled by the exclusion of the problem of racism in communication studies. It seems that topics such as communication apprehension, conflict management, and relationship development receive far more coverage in the literature than power and oppression or racist (a.k.a. discriminatory) behavior or comments. In fact, the latter receives so little attention in communication one would think that the problem of racism does not exist at all. As bell hooks (1995) states, "if we all pretend that racism doesn't exist, that we don't know what it is or how to change it --- it never has to go away" (p. 4). Perhaps, communication scholars, like many people, believe that racism is obsolete, and that white supremacy only exists in the minds of a few fanatics. It makes no sense to study something that is not a problem. Of course, racism is much less likely to seem like a problem if you are white.

I take a feminist perspective which holds that all forms of oppression, white supremacy, racism, classism, sexism and heterosexism must be eliminated. This type of work "tends to encounter a great deal of resistance in the mainstream community" (Reinharz, 1993, p. 71). Furthermore, this work aims to create social change (Reinharz, 1992; Wood, 1997). I will begin by this paper by providing evidence that racism continues to be a problem in the United States. Next, I will review some of the broader cultural issues which Rowan believes will lead to a race war. Then I will discuss several things that we can do as communication scholars to address this social crisis. In academia we have the power to shape young minds, to

set standards for ethical behavior, and to differentiate between behaviors which are competent and incompetent. We have the power to make a difference if we will only open our eyes to the pain and rage we may be directly or indirectly inflicting upon people of color.

Maintaining the Status Quo

"Racism is the systematic, institutionalized mistreatment of one group of people by another based on racial heritage" (Yamato, 1995, p. 73). Racism or bigotry in and of itself would not be very damaging were it not for the power and privilege that certain groups have over others. While individual racism is dysfunctional, institutional racism is far more detrimental to people of color and is more insidious because many people perpetuate racist institutions without being aware that they are doing so. "In a racist system, well meaning White people benefit from racism even if they have no intentions of acting or thinking like a 'racist.' Thus, institutionalized racism creates a built-in system of privilege" (Anderson & Hill-Collins, 1995, p. 60). The benefits of this system of privilege are listed below.

If you are if you are white it will be easier for you to find and retain employment than a person of color, so you are less likely to be unemployed (Barton, Farkas, Kushner, & McCreary, 1985; Farley, 1987). If you are white you will make more money (Barton, et. al, 1985; Squires, 1991) --- even in a government position (Zipp, 1994), and will be less likely to experience job related injury and illness (Robinson, 1984). As a white person, you will be more likely to hold a position of power in an organization (Baker, 1995) and you will hold more wealth (Oliver & Shapiro, 1995; Rowan, 1996). You are less likely be below the poverty line (Massey & Eggers, 1990), and thus your children will have better educational opportunities

(Rowan, 1996). You personally will be more likely to achieve a higher level of education (Wilcox & Roof, 1978). You will be more likely to make an investment in a home and reap the rewards of accumulated equity, because you are more likely to own a house (Jackman & Jackman, 1980) and less likely to experience housing discrimination or be forced to live in the ghettos or housing projects (Darden, 1989; Squires, 1993). Clearly, this sociological research shows that racism (discrimination) continues to plague society. Furthermore, these are not all of the ways in which whites are privileged over people of color, and these privileges do not result from an inherent superiority of whiteness. These privileges result from personal and institutional racism.

So what does this have to do with communication? Why do we have to discuss these issues outside of the subfield of intercultural communication? Racism (discrimination) cannot be separated from discussions of power in relationships, contextual issues which shape interpersonal communication, and participant's expectations of one another in interactions. Institutional racism impacts every interaction that whites have with people of color, even if personal racism is not present in the relationship. Critics will insist that it is not the responsibility of communication scholars to teach history and deal with the social problem of racism. However, I contend that it is irresponsible for us to claim that it is not our job to study racism and callow to dismiss the issue as outside our field of expertise. We have been borrowing scholarship from other fields since our inception, and suddenly we decide to draw the line when we are faced with a difficult, painful and guilt inducing topic. Ignoring racism in communication denies the day to day racism experienced by our students of color, alienates them, and fosters mistrust. Ignoring racism means that communication students will be ill prepared to interact

in a multicultural world. Ignoring racism makes us complicit in perpetuating attitudes and institutions which are dysfunctional and morally wrong --- no matter how liberal and egalitarian we claim to be. The crux of this essay is that many communication scholars need to acknowledge a harmful, humiliating, and self-esteem robbing social problem which we have been partially responsible for promoting, because we have made no concerted effort toward eliminating.

Since racism is still persistent (Simpson, 1996; Tamale, 1996), rage continues to grow among people of color. This rage is an understandable outcome of exploitation and oppression, and expectations of assimilation to white standards in order to succeed (hooks, 1995). Rage is further exacerbated by feelings of hopelessness and nihilism (West, 1993), and a mass media which (contrary to reality) purports that everyone one has equal rights, equal access to success and material goods, and that racism no longer exists (hooks, 1995). Rowan (1996) points to a variety of factors which will lead to racial revolution, and some of his ideas are discussed in more detail below. Although it is easy for whites to ignore or distance themselves from a problem that does not directly affect them, the power and responsibility to eliminate racial injustice is in the hands of whites (Bowser, Hunt, & Petegrew, 1996).

The Coming Race War In America

> "We are going to be at each other's throats, and in more physical and deadly ways, until... white Americans... crawl out of denial and admit that racism is deeply entrenched in this society"
> ~ Carl Rowan, 1996, p. 110

Rowan (1996) contends that the United States is headed for an inevitable race

war. He points out early that Whites[1] will have trouble believing this is true, because many whites do not believe that racism is a problem in the United States. Rowan cites many factors which combine to increase the probability of a race war. He points to the existence of many hate groups like the Freemen, the Aryan Nation, the skin heads, and the Ku Klux Klan. He claims that the government coddles these groups and treats them with kid gloves, and this allows them to steal money through fraud and develop large stock piles of munitions. To this group of "hate mongers" Rowan adds Rush Limbaugh, Howard Stern, Pat Buchanan, Louis Farrakhan and his spokesman Khalid Abdul Muhammad, Bob Grant, G. Gordon Liddy, Newt Gingrich and Richard Cohen. All of these men use their media and political positions to spew racist and hate filled language which serves to further the divide between blacks and whites. This dichotomy forces other people of color to take sides.

In contrast, Rowan praises Johnson, Kennedy, and Carter for their anti-racist policies. Then he points out how Nixon was a subtle but virulent racist, as well as how Reagan, Bush, and Gingrich have played the race card and have not made policies helpful to people of color. Later Rowan discusses losing the ground gained by the civil rights movement and affirmative action programs because of fear on the part of White men who fear that Blacks are taking over. He notes that Blacks compose only 12.5% of the population, and that Black men who are eligible for work or school compose only 2% of the population --- as such, Blacks should not be considered a threat to Whites. Rowan states:

> "In his anger and fear, the angry white man forgets that...he still holds all of the levers of economic power in America; that all American children go to

[1] The reader will note some inconsistency in this work in terms of capitalizing "White" and "Black" in reference to race. Mr. Rowan capitalizes in his work, and when his work is referred to this pattern is maintained out of respect for the author's ideas. References to other authors who do not capitalize also remains consistent with their work. I prefer not to capitalize myself, and so my ideas are represented accordingly.

> school where the white man's literature and history and culture are taught" (p. 105).

The false but widespread belief that affirmative action benefits people of color who are not qualified is fueled by books like The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life by Murray and Herrnstein which contends that blacks are less intelligent than whites.

Rowan gives many examples of racial violence and statistics to prove that racism is alive and well in the U.S. He laments that the "baby boomers have not grown up devoted to racial equality the way that we thought or hoped they would" (p. 22), and that white denial makes equality difficult to achieve. He points out that many powerful whites are bigots who become offended if they are referred to as a racist. Rowan contends that the 33 million black people in the U.S. will not stand for much more (they will fight back when provoked), because of the way that blacks have been degraded and discriminated against.

In an attempt to dispel some of the negative stereotypes about typical welfare recipients and criminals, Rowan cites many examples. For instance he points out that student loans and care for the elderly make up a significant portion of "welfare," showing that a wide variety of people receive government subsidies, not just people of color. Further, he shows that while "blacks do commit a disproportionate number of violent crimes in America," (p. 185) most of this violence is perpetrated against other blacks --- not whites. He points to sociological research which shows that there is a correlation between racism and the amount of violent crime in a community. This situation is further exacerbated by the facts that many police and federal agencies are corrupt and racist, and this leads into his next piece of evidence for the coming race war, the O. J. Simpson trial.

Rowan carefully deconstructs the trial, starting with biographical sketch of

O.J.'s relationships with women before the trial and leading the audience through the proceedings to the verdict. He shows how and why the trial turned into a race issue, and does a convincing job of showing that the prosecution did not prove that O. J. was guilty. Rowan contends that when the verdict was announced, the differences between the reactions of whites (who were horrified and angered) and blacks (who were ecstatic and relieved) points to an existing racial divide.

Carl Rowan also discusses the rise of Powell-mania and the fact that Americans are not yet ready for a black president, in spite of claims to be unbiased and committed to equality. He focuses on the importance of black education and scholarships, and cites a study which shows that the greatest threat to intelligence is poverty and lack of educational opportunities. Since three times as many black children as whites fall below the poverty line, their ability to succeed in school is significantly impaired. Finally, Rowan states that it is unlikely that it will be possible to prevent a race war due to the prevalence of arms held by white supremacist groups and black gangs, and the rage which has been allowed to fester in these groups. His suggestion is the disarmament of these groups by the government. He closes the book with a call for the enhancement of law enforcement, the acknowledgement of black rage, and a commitment to disadvantaged children. Rowan ends the book with these words;

> We must be bold, because the haters have a head start on us. We have for too long been afraid to talk openly to each other about the threat of widespread racial conflict in America....destiny has lumped us together in a crisis that involves our national and personal well-being. Are we up to this challenge? (p. 298).

Opening Our Eyes and Stepping Up

Rowan's (1996) question applies to this audience and this discussion. Are we

up to the challenge? Are we prepared to step out of the Ivory Tower and deal with reality? Will we do our part as social scientists to shape behavioral norms and world views in a noble way? In this section, I will outline a few of the ideas that I believe will help to bring the issue of racism to the forefront in our classes. The first proposal involves recognizing the power and privilege held by whites. Next, I propose that we reexamine history in order to see the ways that it shapes race relations today, and to prevent us from making the same abhorrent mistakes again. Then I advocate that we develop and teach values and ethics which foster equality. Blatantly talking about racism and referring to racism as dysfunctional, deplorable behavior is also important. We need to explore our role in perpetuating white supremacy in communication. And finally, we need to examine some behaviors which may be interpreted as racist by people of color, as well as some concrete tools which will empower our students to stand up against racism.

Recognizing the Power and Privilege of Whites

The first step that scholars can take to terminate racism is to recognize the power and privilege which is granted to white people based solely on the color of their skin (McIntosh, 1990). As previously mentioned, our society is non-equitable because of the perpetuation of hierarchy in our culture. "Racism and ethnocentrism have become institutionalized and are practiced unconsciously...the result is a structured domination of people of color by the white European American power structure" (Porter & Samovar, 1997, p. 8). According to Folb (1997), one way to establish power, control and status is through brute force (i.e. conquering, enslavement, and colonization). However, this is not the most effective way to acquire and hold power. It is considerably easier to institute and

encourage aspects of culture which reinforce the continuation of the power elite, such as rules for appropriate behavior, speech, thought, and action. While certain people have greater access to power and high status based on their gender, color of skin, religion, sexual preference, or able-bodiedness, non-dominant groups tend to be invisible and objectified, and low status tends to be assigned to people the elite define as different or deviant.

The existing hierarchy maintains caste and class differences and promotes role prescriptions and expectations. It is very difficult for people in non-dominant groups to move to the top of the hierarchy. The powerful are able to keep non-dominant groups in their place by the "culture bound collection of prejudices, stereotypes, values, and beliefs that each of us embraces and employs to justify our world view and place of the people in that world" (Folb, 1997, p. 144). For instance, a mark of the power elite's resistance to relinquish positions associated with privileged status ranking is exhibited by the hostility and resistance some face when aspiring to certain roles, as well as the necessity of the person to conform to the elite's standard's and norms.

Thus, it becomes important for us to recognize the way that power is perpetuated and examine these practices in the classroom. Are these practices fair, and do we have the ability to do anything about them? What can we teach future leaders and managers about the way that power is used to make people assimilate? What implications does this assimilation have? Who benefits, and who loses? How does this hierarchy fit with our vision of equality? Finally, how can we develop a more flexible, inclusive, and tolerant set of behavioral norms, and the tolerance for uncertainty that must accompany this breadth of norms?

Revisiting History

Knowledge of history is also important in terms of understanding power relationships. "Power is... the legacy, the remnants of history that leaves cultural groups in particular positions" (Martin & Nakayama, 1997, p. 103). Many of the non-dominant groups today are those who have historically been enslaved, colonized, and relegated to poverty. Several scholars (Asante, 1988; Munford, 1996) cite the importance of the need to educate ourselves and address historical issues before we can eliminate racism. Unfortunately, many history texts and classes superficially treat or ignore the contributions of people of color and gloss over the oppression, subjugation and annihilation of thousands of people of color and some whites (Irish and Jews) by Anglo Saxons who considered themselves to be superior. The presentation of history in this manner denies the experiences of oppressed groups, prevents students from discussing the morals of their ancestor's behavior, and prevents us from seeing the ways in which we continue to contribute to their oppression. In this way, history repeats itself, and we are doomed to make the same mistakes again

Any college instructor who works with minority students should examine a text such as A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America. In this book, Takaki (1993) presents a brilliant and startling account of the ways that Blacks, Asians, the Irish, Native Americans, Jews, and Chicanos were terrorized, exploited, betrayed and slaughtered in the formative years of the U. S. This historical account differs significantly from the ones many students receive in public school. Knowledge of this history can help us understand the location from which people of color speak, for a careful reader will find many parallels in today's society. As the U. S. becomes increasingly diverse, there is a growing backlash against people of

color and an even greater emphasis on Eurocentrism and cultural hegemony. The irrational fear that the "bad elements" of society are taking over the jobs and the wealth not only parallels the formative years of the U. S., it also parallels Hitler's propaganda --- and that gives us six million reasons to rethink our stance on power and our tolerance of difference.

Developing Values and Ethics

Power is developed and sustained through the socialization of individuals to endorse certain values and norms of behavior. Children are not born racist. Discrimination and racism are learned through our experiences and interactions with others, and these attitudes and behaviors are reinforced by social institutions (Klopf, 1995). Irrational hate and hostile behavior are abnormal and destructive. If children can be taught to curb their violent impulses, then people can be taught to curb their racist tendencies as well.

One way to frame our discussions of equality may be to start with Buber's (1970) conception of the I - Thou relationship. According to Buber, we must first know and accept ourselves, as well as overcome our need to control, before we can accept other people. If people are allowed to be themselves, and these distinctions are accepted, then people can co-exist. We are able to make contact with others through dialogue, and dialogue is seen as the bridge between humans. Language is the instrument of meaning and the ultimate way of knowing.

Another means of framing discussions of equality is to establish ethical guidelines for communicating. Christians (1997) advocates the adoption of three basic principles, or protonorms which are appropriate to discussions of racism. The first principle is that of human dignity. We need to have reverence for all human

beings. "Every child, woman, and man has sacred status, with no exceptions for religion, class, gender, age, or ethnicity" (p. 13). The second principle involves nonviolence, or a "commitment to living together peacefully" (p. 14). The third, and most challenging principle is truth-telling. Deception is seen as destructive, while the truth is seen as fundamental to the development of human relationships and trust.

This last principle will be the most difficult to grapple with, for white people deny that racism and discrimination exist. "Discrimination tends to be attributed to others, or it will be denied, toned down, or excused, if not presented as being provoked by the different behavior of the Others" (van Dijk, 1993, p. 156). People tend to avoid the term *racism*, and replace it with the weaker, more politically correct euphemism *discrimination*. As Asante (1988) points out, *discrimination* is just a nice way of saying *racism*, and like all euphemisms which soften or take the sting out of the original word, the term *discrimination* makes the problem of *racism* seem less important. Diminishing the importance of this social problem is disempowering to people of color, because it denies or minimizes the day to day oppression they experience. hooks (1995) contends that many people are not aware that they hold racist attitudes, since socialization and indoctrination of Eurocentric attitudes and values is beyond most people's awareness. Part of this ignorance is due in part to the fact that the words we use to describe the problem minimize it. Thus, rather than using the term discrimination, we need to use the term racism. Furthermore, to uphold the principle of telling the truth, people must have the courage to admit that they hold racist attitudes or beliefs. This will not be easy, because it is simply not politically correct to be a racist. But if everyone who claimed to be unbiased actually was, we wouldn't have the problem with racism that we do.

If one is unable to admit to racist attitudes, then these attitudes and fears cannot be explored, and ultimately eliminated.

Talking About Racism In Communication Classes

Aside from our positions as whites, our positions in academia also grant us a large amount of power and influence. According to Foucault, access to and ability to disseminate a body of knowledge allows some privileged individuals to define reality (Rabinow, 1984). Our "ideologies, students, research results, reports, and advice play a fundamental role in...the management of organizations and the State...[as well as] in the domain of ethnic relations" (van Dijk, 1993, p. 158). Unfortunately, racism is sporadically addressed in the communication literature.

A systematic review of journal articles reveals that very few articles about racism exist, and these are found primarily in rhetorical and mass communication studies. I also examined twelve interpersonal and general communication textbooks found on my bookshelf (admittedly not a random or generalizable sample) and found that of the twelve, only five mention race, racial discrimination, and/or racial inequality. Furthermore, this subject was not addressed in these texts except in the most general way and at the most for a few pages. The absence of any significant amount of discussion in the communication literature means that communication students will be able to proceed through their entire academic career without any knowledge of racism and oppression. Without this knowledge, graduating students will move into positions of power and unknowingly perpetuate racist institutions, and they will be ill prepared to deal with people who are different than themselves.

As communication scholars, we have the ability to define appropriate and

inappropriate behaviors and beliefs. We already do this when we theorize, categorize, and normalize appropriate and effective communication behaviors. There is no reason why we cannot extend this discussion to race relations --- we can define racism and the forms that it takes in discourse as deviant. Instead of discussing racism in superficial ways, we need to be blatantly intolerant of racism. Include case studies in classes. Demonstrate the difference between racist behavior and dialogues (especially the subtle forms of racism) and open or tolerant behavior and dialogues. Call racist behaviors incompetent to send the message that you cannot be a racist and still be considered a competent communicator. Does it make sense that if during a conversation a person makes eye contact, shows empathy, and responds at the appropriate time s/he is communicatively competent even if s/he is a bigot, homophobic, or misogynist? It is important that we explicitly delineate hate as unacceptable behavior which inhibits the establishment of relationships between all people. These are indeed moral judgments, and thus there is risk associated with teaching and practicing these values. If you stand up to racism, no matter how awkward and uncomfortable your remarks, then you will be considered competent, and doing the right thing. I think that the payoff could be seen immediately in terms of reducing racial tensions on our college campuses, and in the long run as these students move into positions of power and authority. We would be creating a new paradigm for competency.

Examining White Supremacy in Our Departments

Very few people, with the exception of members of the Ku Klux Klan, Aryan Nation, and skin heads admit to being racist. I Imagine that no one reading this paper imagines themselves to be a white supremist. But we cannot ignore a simple

fact. Just as women have criticized academia as being inherently sexist because women's voices were excluded from research and literature, people of color can criticize that academia inherently promotes white supremacy because their voices are excluded or muted. In order to find a job or to be published in mainstream journals, one has to conform to existing norms and ideologies, and these are White ideologies. In her experience as an English professor, bell hooks (1995) explains her experiences in academia as such:

> It may have been this contact with fellow white English professors who want very much to have "a" black person in "their" department as long as that person thinks and acts like them, shares their values and beliefs, is in no way different, that first compelled me to use the term "white supremacy" to identify the ideology that most determines how white people in this society (irrespective of their political leanings to the right or left) perceive and relate to black people and other people of color. It is the very small but highly visible movement away from the perpetuation of overtly racist discrimination, exploitation, and oppression of black people which often masks how all-pervasive white supremacy is in this society, both as ideology and as behavior (p. 185).

I do not wish to enter into a diatribe about the need to include a diversity of voices in communication literature. I do want to point out that we have to recognize that it is white standards that we ask our students to live up to. When we refer to communication competency, we mean white competency. When we talk about managerial effectiveness, we mean white managerial effectiveness. When we talk about effective public speaking, we are measuring students against European American standards, not African, Asian, Hispanic or Native American. What do students of color think when they are taught certain norms for behavior at home and then are told that those norms are wrong when they come to school? Or they are told that they must conform if they wish to be employable? I can't imagine anything more oppressive, and I can see now why so many students of color give up

on an education. It may be necessary to take special measures to ensure the advancement of certain groups, in order for these groups to enjoy the same freedoms and human rights that the dominant group enjoys (Lerner, 1970).

Developing New Competencies

When we talk about competency in terms of racism, we must focus attention upon the receiver in the conversation. As we know, intent is irrelevant. It doesn't matter if you didn't *mean* to make a racist remark. If it is interpreted in that manner, *it is a racist remark*. So, how can we know what behaviors and language can be interpreted as racist by people of color? I don't have all of the answers to that question, but it certainly deserves more attention. I don't think most people want to come across as racist, and I believe if they were aware of behaviors which were racist, they would stop enacting them. First I will list some statements that Marsha Houston (1997) describes as racist. Then I will discuss some of the behaviors Tamale (1996) describes as racist. Unfortunately, simply avoiding these behaviors is not enough. We must stand up against racist comments, not let them slide by out of a desire to be polite or respectful. For it is the persistence of these attitudes which has caused the problems that we experience today, and these problems will not disappear until whites actively work to eliminate racism. Thus, I will show Simpson's (1996) ideas of some statements and behaviors that we should avoid, followed by an appropriate response to deal with such racist comments.

Houston (1996) notes that conversations between blacks and whites are difficult and tend to be characterized by mistrust. Many of the utterances of whites are not intended to be racist, but serve as a constant source of stress for blacks because they are interpreted as such. For instance, saying "She can't help it if she is

black" (p. 188), is speaking about someone as if their color were an affliction. Or stating "I never even notice that you're black" (p. 191) denies the person's history, experiences, and comes across as if color is something which should be overlooked. "You're different from other black people" (p. 192) is seen as an effort to separate the color from the person, and implies that it is all right to hate certain black people. Finally, the statement "I understand your experience as a black person because..." (p. 192), is perceived as arrogant and shows the ignorance of the white speaker who could never *really* understand what it means to be black.

In a study which examined racism on a Midwestern campus, Tamale (1996) observed many racist behaviors. In the student union, she observed that whites would avoid tables where people of color sat. When people of color sat down next to whites and Asians, they would often vacate their tables "after a few polite minutes" (p. 480), or would visibly shift and rearrange themselves. She also caught white people staring at people of color as if they were animals at the zoo. She (an African woman) noted one day that a group of Asians was aggressively selling roses on Valentines Day, and approached every table except hers. She notes that one of the ways that racism manifests itself is by the dominant group ignoring the very existence of minorities. An example of this would be when a white student speaks to a classmate (student of color) during class but then ignores this person outside of class. Tamale (1996) concludes from her study that "racism is as much a part of American life as apple pie or baseball, and that it is multifaceted" (p. 479).

Simpson (1996) advocates that people notice and interrupt racist remarks, using what she refers to as "back talk." She notes that;

> back talk is not taught often, easily or effortlessly. Learning back talk, especially for those of us who practice White talk, is never simple. Back talk, talk that dares to intervene, interrupt, intercede, and interrogate, is neither popularly practiced nor popularly received. Back talk has nothing to do with

> popularity. Back talk, whose lessons lie in the messiness of life, is revolutionary, rigorous, and in Back talk, rises out of righteous indignation (p. 384).

Back talk is intimidating, upsetting, risky, uncomfortable, and difficult. But it is necessary. If we allow racist remarks to pass without comment, then we are complicit in perpetuating racism. In this essay, Simpson gives examples of white talk (racist talk) and the appropriate response (back talk) which I list below (from pages 378 & 385).

White talk in a classroom:

> "Letitia, as our Latin American Representative, what would your people think about this?"

Back talk:

> "Excuse me, Dr. Johnson, but if Letitia's got to speak for all Latin Americans, is one of us White students going to have to represent all of the White people in the United States?"

White talk with a friend:

> "Did you hear Ann's on a full ride?" "Yeah, I also heard she's Native American."

Back talk:

> "Yeah, I know Ann is Native American. She is also smart and got great SAT scores."

White talk from a teacher:

> "Here is a list of scientists for your final project. Please choose one by next week. Oh, you can also pick someone not on the list. If you want to write about a scientist of color --- I'm in full support of diversity --- I'm sure the librarian can help you find a name."

Back talk:

> "Dr. Berkely, thanks for the option to do a report on someone not on the list, a scientist of color, but it seems unfair that to do so, we have to do extra work."

As you can see, back talk is indeed risky. We may personally suffer negative

consequences at work, at school, or we may even lose friendships. I am sure that people who were active in the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960's faced the same dilemma. No matter how militant people were then, the problem is that many people lost their resolve over time. But, however difficult, we must find new resolve, and the time is now.

Conclusion

As social scientists, we need to explicitly address the problems of racism. We must acknowledge the privilege of whites, and become familiar with multicultural history, so that we do not continue to oppress people of color. We also need to take a long hard look at the materials that we have been teaching and eliminate ideology which promotes white supremacy. We need to take a strong stand against racist behaviors and discourse, for if we don't we are complicit in the continuation of racism. And, we need to address race and racism in the primary communication journals, which are held in high esteem in our field and which have the most power to change the ways that we look at and teach communication. Finally, we must equip our students with specific skills to deal with racist remarks when they occur in interaction.

I don't expect to win any popularity contests with this work, but my experience at a weekend diversity retreat and my research has shown me that racism is prevalent in the lives of people of color. They are mistreated by whites on a day to day basis. People of color hate whites for this savage treatment, and frankly, I can't blame them. The prevalence of racism also means that most of the relationships between whites and people of color are characterized by mistrust, before we even begin to talk to one another. Sound relationships cannot be formed, and honest

communication cannot take place until we recognize racism as an obstacle to effective communication.

When I was an undergraduate communication major, I imagined that the skills I learned in communication would enable me to make the world a better place. After all, I would be helping people to learn how to appreciate one another and get along. In retrospect, I realize that my education only prepared me to help white people appreciate and get along with one another. After ten years of studying and teaching communication, my idealizism is tempered, but I realize that I (and others who wish to) can still make the world a better place by equipping our students will the knowledge and skills they need to operate in a multicultural environment free from oppression. First we must admit that there is a problem. Then we must acknowledge our role in the problem, and finally do what we can to eliminate racism, promote diversity, and work toward equality. I am an optimist, and I believe that if we make a concentrated and cooperative effort to accomplish these goals the children of the twenty first century will live in a world where respect, unity, and peace dominate the hearts and minds of people.

As we approach the new millennium, we need to reevaluate some of the ideologies and practices in the field of communication. What are we doing as communication scholars to prevent a legacy of hate and oppression from following us into the twenty-first century? Recently I heard Jonathan Kozol, a human rights activist and renowned author, give a lecture on poverty and racism. He spoke of trying to convince friends to take action against racism and shared that it was common for his friends to refer back to their activism in their college days, and say that "I was on the bridge at Selma." Kozal dryly remarked that if everyone who claimed to be on the bridge at Selma was actually there, the bridge would have

collapsed. But more importantly, the question that Kozol asked his friends, and the question that I extend to my audience is "what bridge do you stand on today?"

References

Anderson, M. & Hill Collins, P. (Ed.s) (1995). Race, Class, and Gender, an Anthology. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Asante, M. (1988). . Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc.

Baker, L. (1995). Racism in professional settings: forms of address as clues to power relations. Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 31, (2), 186 - 201.

Barton, M., Farkas, G., Kushner, K. & McCreary, L. (1985). White, Black and Hispanic male youths in central city labor markets. Social Science Research, 14, (3), 266 - 286.

Bowser, B., Hunt, R., & Petegrew, T. (1996). Impacts of Racism on White Americans. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Buber, M. (1970). I and Thou. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Christians, C. (1997). The ethics of being in a communication context. In C. Christians & M. Traber (Eds.) Communication Ethics and Universal Values. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Darden, J. (1989). Afro-American inequality within the urban structures of the United States: 1967 - 1987. Journal of Developing Societies, 5, (1), 1 - 14.

Farley, J. (1987). Disproportionate Black and Hispanic unemployment in the U. S. metropolitan areas: The roles of racial inequality, segregation, and discrimination in male joblessness. American Journal of Economics and Sociology, 46, (2), 129 - 150.

Folb, E. (1997). Who's got room at the top? Issues of dominance and nondominance in intracultural communication. In L. Samovar & R. Porter (Eds.) Intercultural Communication: A Reader. New York: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

hooks, b. (1995). Killing Rage: Ending Racism. New York: Henry Holt.

Houston, M. (1997). When Black women talk with White women: Why dialogues are different. In A. Gonzales, M. Houston, & V. Chen (Eds.) Our Voices: Essays in Culture, Ethnicity, and Communication. Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing Company.

Huszar, G. (1946). Anatomy of Racial Intolerance. New York: H. W. Wilson Company.

Jackman, M., & Jackman, R. (1980). Racial inequalities in home ownership. Social Forces, 58, (4), 1221 - 1234.

Lerner, N. (1970). The U. N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Leyen, Netherlands: A. W. Sijthoff.

Klopf, D. (1995). Intercultural Encounters: The Fundamentals of Intercultural Communication. Englewood, CO: Morton Publishing Company.

Martin, J. & Nakayama, T. (1997). Intercultural Communication In Contexts. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company.

Massey, D., & Eggers, M. (1990). The ecology of inequality: Minorities and the concentration of poverty, 1970 - 1980. American Journal of Sociology, 95, (5), 1153 - 1188.

McIntosh, P. (1990). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. Independent School, 4, 31 - 34.

Munford, C. (1996). Race and Reparations: A Black Perspective for the 21st Century. Trenton, NJ: African World Press.

Oliver, M. & Shapiro, T. (1995). Black Wealth / White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality. New York: Routledge.

Page, C. (1996). Showing My Color: Impolite Essays on Race and Identity. New York: Harper Perennial.

Porter, R. & Samovar, L. (1997). An introduction to intercultural communication. In L. Samovar & R. Porter (Eds.) Intercultural Communication: A Reader. New York: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Rabinow, P. (Ed.) (1984). The Foucault Reader. New York: Pantheon Books.

Reinharz, S. (1992). Feminist Methods in Social Research. New York: Oxford University Press.

Reinharz, S. (1993). Neglected Voices and excessive demands in feminist research. Qualitative Sociology, 16, (1), 69 - 76.

Robinson, J. (1984). Health and Society, 62, (4), 567 - 590.

Rowan, C. (1996). The Coming Race War in America: A Wake-up Call. Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company.

Sicard, G., Moorman, R., Nichols, C., & McNair, J. (1994). Individuals in Transition. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company.

Simpson, J. (1996). Easy talk, white talk, back talk: Some reflections on the meanings of our words. Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 25, (3), 372 - 389.

Squires, G. (1991). Deindustrialization, economic democracy, and equal opportunity: The changing context of race relations in urban America. Comparative Urban and Community Research, 3, 188 - 215.

Squires, G. (1993). The political economy of housing: All the discomforts of home. Research in Urban Sociology, 3, 129 - 157.

Takaki, R. (1993). A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America. Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company.

Tamale, S. (1996). The outsider looks in: Constructing knowledge about American collegiate racism. Qualitative Sociology, 19, (4), 471 - 495.

van Dijk, T. (1993). Elite Discourse and Racism. Newbury Park, NJ: Sage Publications.

West, C. (1993). Race Matters. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Wilcox, J, & Roof, W. (1978). Percent of Black and White status inequality: Southern versus Nonsouthern patterns. Social Science Quarterly, 59, (3).

Wood, J. (1997). Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, and Culture. New York: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Yamato, G. (1995). Race and racism: Something about the subject makes it hard to name. In Anderson, M. & Hill Collins, P. (Ed.s).

Zipp, J. (1994). Government employment and Black-White earnings inequality. Social Problems, 41, (3), 363 - 382.

Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

Predilection

"the simple preference of an individual for one culture, one skin color, one language, as opposed to another...[this] may turn into prejudice" (Huszar, 1946, 125).

Prejudice

"refers to an attitude of aversion and hostility toward the members of a group simply because they belong to it and are therefore assumed to have the objectionable qualities ascribed to the group" (Sicard, Moorman, Nichols, & McNair, 1994, p. 390).

Racial Discrimination

"any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, decent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, or any other field of public life" (Lerner, 1970, p. 38).

Racism

"the belief or practice that devalues other races as biologically and morally inferior. It is not just an internalized personal belief or attitude. It is also an externalized public practice, a power relationship that continually dominates, encourages, and reproduces the very conditions that make it so useful and profitable" (Page, 1996, p. 77).

Scapegoating

" a phenomenon wherein some of the aggressive energies of a person or group are focused upon another individual, group, or object; the mount of aggression and blame being partly or wholly unwarranted;...the full-fledged persecution of those against whom we are prejudiced and against whom we discriminate" (Huszar, 1946, 125 - 126).

White Racism

"has a solid, practical purpose --- to establish and perpetuate white supremacy. It sanctions discrimination against people of color, justified on biological grounds, in order to secure the objective material interest that white people have in keeping social relations the way they are, permanently" (Munford, 1996, p. 28

BEST COPY AVAILABLE